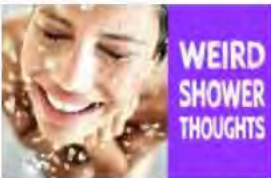






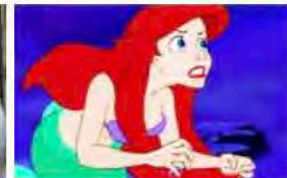
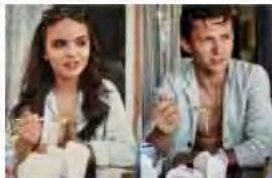






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Department Of Justice Lawyers Fear Trump Will Scrap All Their Work To Overhaul The Chicago Police

Attorneys at the DOJ — amid low morale — are continuing to work on finalizing a federal consent decree, even though it's unclear if the Trump administration will follow through with it.

Posted on May 25, 2017, at 12:22 p.m.


 **Mike Hayes**
BuzzFeed News Reporter



President Trump and Attorney General Jeff Sessions
Evan Vucci / AP

Career lawyers at the Department of Justice are still working on an agreement — amid low morale — that would give the federal government oversight of the Chicago police, despite a last month to place the measure, and those like it

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Department of Justice.

The DOJ did not respond to requests for comment on this article.



Former Attorney General Loretta Lynch, former Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta, and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel on Friday, Jan. 13, 2017, in Chicago. Teresa Crawford / AP

Seven days before Trump's inauguration, the DOJ issued a [scathing 164-page report](#) that concluded that Chicago police were poorly trained and engaged in a pattern of excessive and sometimes deadly force, for which they rarely if ever faced consequences. The report said the action of police "helped create a culture in which officers expect to use force and not be questioned about the need for or propriety of that use."

The report also found that black and brown people bore the brunt of the abuse. Statistics cited by the DOJ showed that CPD used force almost 10 times more often against blacks than against whites.

After the report was issued, attorneys inside the DOJ began setting up meetings with local lawyers, activists, and politicians to move the process forward.

Matt Topic, attorney with the firm Loevy & Loevy, who represents Illinois' Better Government Association, told BuzzFeed News he met with attorneys from the DOJ and others in late February to discuss transparency in the process.

"They genuinely seemed interested in what we had to say while acknowledging that forces beyond their control come into play," Topic said, describing the meeting with DOJ attorneys.

"It is important to the people of Chicago that we know where the DOJ stands on this. It's important that this is done right," he added. (Topic represents BuzzFeed News in two cases unrelated to Chicago and federal consent decree negotiations.)

Craig Futterman, University of Chicago law professor and civil rights attorney, who regularly consults with the DOJ in this process, said he's spoken with members of the team who said they are pushing forward with drafting an agreement. Still Futterman said he remains pessimistic about the Trump administration's desire to see it through.

"Jefferson Sessions and Donald Trump don't have the political heart to confront this problem. They're not committed to it," Futterman said. "It's a very sad and tragic day when the feds force our nation's most fundamental laws—the very

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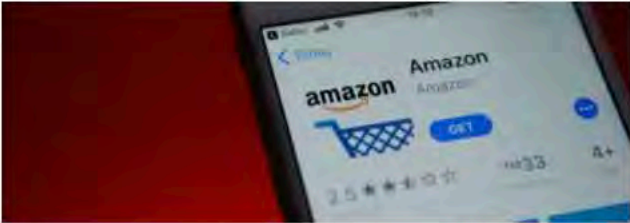


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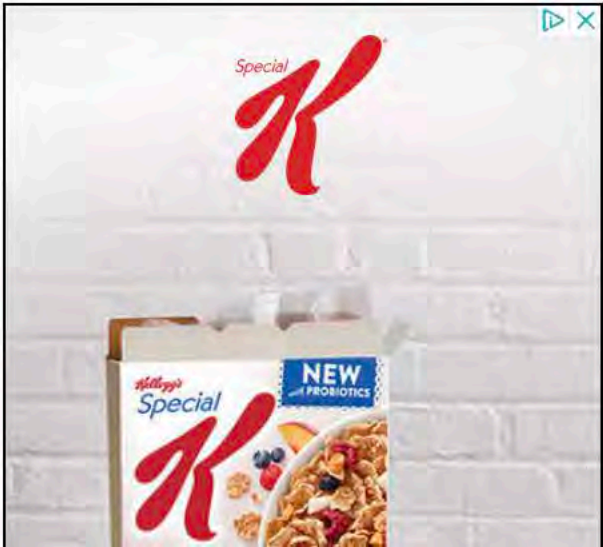


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"Jefferson Sessions and Donald Trump don't have the political heart to confront this problem. They're not committed to it," Futterman said. "It's a very sad and tragic day when the feds abdicate their responsibility to enforce our nation's most fundamental laws—the very Constitution of the United States of America."

Sessions has made it clear that he doubts how effective federal consent decrees can be when reshaping local police. In an ABC News interview after being confirmed as attorney general, Sessions derided recent DOJ reports as "pretty anecdotal and not so scientifically based."

"You have 800,000 police in America. Imagine a city of 800,000 people," Sessions said. "There's going to be some crime in it, some people are going to make errors."

"The findings that we made in Chicago were really serious, they were informed by extensive analysis — thousands of pages, hundreds of interviews — thoroughly documented and supported," former head of the DOJ civil rights division Vanita Gupta told BuzzFeed News.

In January, the DOJ said it interviewed over 1,000 community members and 90 community organizations for its investigation in Chicago.

"When we were there, we were talking to people who refused to talk to police," Gupta said.

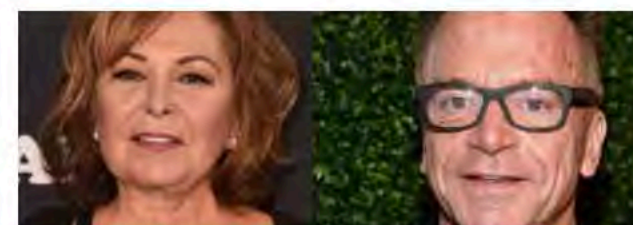
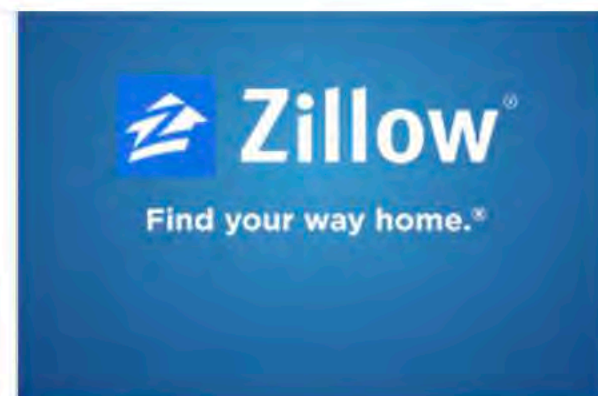
Gupta, who is the incoming president of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, added that she hopes Sessions will "do the right thing" and not adopt a strategy "that leaves out what we documented in the findings report."



Frame from dash-cam video provided by the Chicago Police Department, Laquan McDonald, right, walks down the street moments before being shot by officer Jason Van Dyke in Chicago.
Chicago Police Department / Via AP

The DOJ began its investigation into the Chicago police in December 2015, one month after police released the video of teenager Laquan McDonald, who was shot 16 times.

Now some of the local residents who spearheaded unearthing the video are amongst the most skeptical that Sessions' DOJ is going to help bring real changes in the wake of McDonald's death.



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“I think it’s all but inconceivable that anything is going to come out of the Sessions DOJ, though we haven’t had definitive word,” said Jamie Kalven, Chicago journalist whose investigative reporting helped lead to the release of the McDonald video.

“Prevailing assumption around here is that there won’t be a consent decree coming from the DOJ,” he said.

Will Calloway, a local Chicago activist and a plaintiff in the lawsuit that got the McDonald video released to the public, said he’s not “holding his breath” for a consent decree to happen.

“I think it’s safe to say that nothing has happened because of the newly appointed AG Jeff Sessions, I think the AG has made it clear that he’s not a big fan of consent decrees,” Calloway said.

Calloway said he believes that one alternative would be for the Mayor’s office to take on a bigger role in pushing change.

“You don’t need a consent decree if Rahm Emanuel wants to implement all the recommendations,” Calloway said. “You could do the reforms yourself. It doesn’t take a federal suit.

“I have no confidence in Rahm Emanuel whatsoever, but it’s another option,” he added.

Emanuel’s office points to its efforts locally since the McDonald tape was made public to bring changes to the police. Earlier in May, Chicago announced new use of force policies for officers. The city has also expanded its use of body-worn cameras for all officers on patrol, and a introduced a program to equip all officers with TASERs. Chicago police have also started a new de-escalation training program, increased mental health emergency response training, and the City has implemented a new video-release policy for police incidents.

“Our commitment is evident in the work we’ve done over the past 18 months, and the work we are doing right now,” a spokesperson for Emanuel said in a statement.

But some believe that real change required federal intervention.

Futterman said he thinks Chicago “is incapable of ending its pattern of civil rights violations on its own.”

“The problems are far too entrenched. External monitoring and oversight are required for there to be real and enduring change in Chicago. We can’t do this without an outside hammer,” he said.

Michael Hayes is a senior reporter for BuzzFeed News and is based in New York. Contact Mike Hayes at mike@buzzfeed.com.

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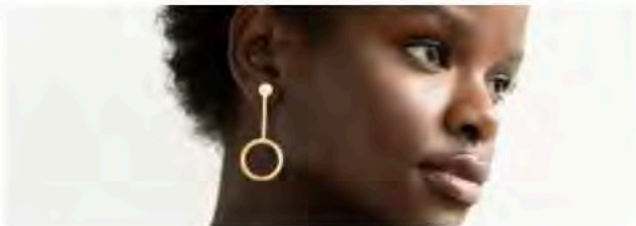
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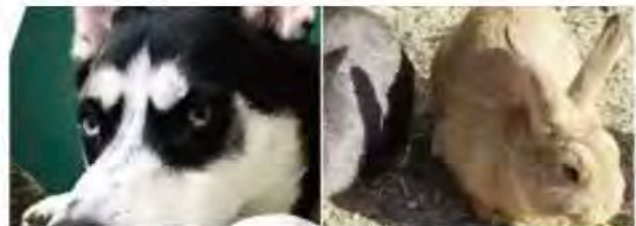


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